



**GETHSEMANE**



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**By Father Pichon S.J.**

**True lessons on the sufferings of  
Our Lord in the Garden of Olives**

**Cover art taken from a hand-painted pall depicting:**

**The Agony in the Garden**

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## **THE TRUE LESSONS ON THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD IN THE GARDEN OF OLIVES**

Let us consider the Passion of Our Lord, His supreme Passion, which took place in the Garden of Olives. There, He endured a Passion of the Heart, of Love spurned, rejected, and betrayed. All the tortures He endured after that—the outrages, the brutality of which He was the object when He was delivered over to the executioners—all was little compared to what He suffered in Gethsemane.

It seems Our Lord needed to pass through all the phases of suffering. Through His martyrdom, He needed to take to Himself all the sharpest elements in suffering and, thus in some mystic way, to alleviate our sufferings. In suffering, a soul experiences three bitter griefs—swords that pierce the heart through and through. 1) We feel we suffer alone. 2) We feel our sufferings are valueless, without merit. 3) We feel, finally, our sufferings are, in some way, culpable. These three martyrdoms render our sufferings doubly painful.

First, it seems to us that we suffer alone. "If only I could know that I do not suffer alone." "I feel myself so isolated in my anguish." "It seems that I am the only one to taste such bitterness." "Alas, my sorrow must not spring from a good source."

The enemy of our soul, jealous of the glory we render to God through suffering, tries to render it insupportable to us by making us believe our sufferings are sterile, that we suffer without merit. It is this aspect that causes us to feel our pain so intensely that it throws us into a profound bitterness, a kind of despair. "If I knew that through these pangs I was purchasing at least one soul, I should bless my anguish. I should be content to suffer. However, what breaks my heart is that I can perceive no fruit to be gathered from my trials. They appear to be sterile."

There is a third pain, even more bitter than the two preceding ones. Not only do we believe ourselves to be suffering alone and without merit, but also it appears to us that, instead of meriting, we are actually offending God. Our sufferings appear to have resulted from our defects and are, therefore, culpable. There arises within our hearts an accumulation of things that trouble our peace and security as God's dear children.



**But we never suffer alone. Our sufferings are never sterile. Above all, our sufferings are never culpable.**

I do not want to exaggerate. Is it that, in our sufferings, we may not offend God by a lack of resignation, a lack of patience, or some other similar venial faults that arise from the very excess of our pain? I claim there is much less of this than is commonly thought. It may be that we lose some merits, but how much does the indubitable gain compensate for the loss? How many good persons cover themselves with reproaches, distressing themselves unduly, over having felt a certain repugnance to their trials?

Oh, how I love these words of a saint, "The cross never appears in a life without leaving there some good." He did not say, "The cross, well-accepted, carried joyously by a generous heart." No, every cross leaves benign traces in a life, even—and I shall go so far as to say, above all—a cross meagerly, miserably accepted.

Our Lord, who gives individual care to each soul, says to Himself, "From every possible consideration, this soul is about to acquire more merits, make more progress, glorify Me more, if I send him this trial. It will be profitable to him." The hour for suffering then has arrived. It is the hour of salvation.

Let us ask of the Holy Spirit that we may fully understand this page—admirable, sublime, and incomparable—where He Himself dictates all the passages. What a wonderful page, a page capable of furnishing a balm for all wounds, a remedy and a consolation for all who suffer! I admit, before I came to understand this, suffering was, for me, a mystery.

Jesus then went toward the Garden of Olives. On the way He felt Himself invaded by a profound, heartbreaking sadness that enveloped His whole being. It was a sadness that all His courage could not throw off and that wrested from Him this cry, "My soul is sorrowful unto death." This was not a vain expression or a rhetorical exaggeration.

How strangely I once misunderstood this scene! I imagined that, like the first martyrs, He would have gone into the midst of tortures singing, that He would have been joyous in the midst of His trials, of His incredible sufferings! Our Lord did not sing. He was not overwhelmed with joy. He was not full of happiness. On the contrary, He was overcome with sadness to the point that His terrible agony wrested from Him that cry, "My soul is sorrowful unto death, even to die of grief."



When I behold the martyrs singing, throwing themselves upon the instruments of torture, and kissing the instruments of their death--when I see them calling their executioners their benefactors and expressing gratitude to those who persecute them--I can see clearly what they suffered in their bodies. However, I do not see what they suffered in their souls. Their souls were in perfect serenity. Their souls already tasted heaven through anticipation. Their interior joy rendered them insensible to their physical torments.

The martyrs endured torture in their bodies. Jesus, King of Martyrs, wanted to be a martyr in His soul. My divine King did not sing in going to His martyrdom. His Heart was stricken. His soul was sad, sad unto death.

Oh, my soul, why then reproach me for my sorrow? Why are you so severe toward me? Why do you demand that I suffer with joy like the martyrs, when God permits suffering to invade me, to overwhelm me? Our Lord endured sorrow before I did, and more sorrow than I ever have or ever will, yet His sufferings were good and meritorious. Ah, then, in my grief I can present myself to Jesus, kneel beside Him in Gethsemane, unite my pain to that of His Heart. No, I am not alone when I suffer with overwhelming sorrow. Jesus suffers with me.

The Holy Spirit emphasizes another detail. Our Lord began to be afraid. How is that? Our Lord afraid? Of what? Of His bitter chalice, of His Passion, of His cross, of the will of His Father? It was necessary that He drain His chalice to the last drop, yet He was afraid.

Do I still dare to believe that a generous soul must never quail before suffering? Do I believe we must always look upon it with joy? Go out to meet it? Oh, my soul, why do you reproach me for my fears, my apprehensions? Even when I tremble before trials, even when the sight of the cross fills me with fear, I can still present myself at Gethsemane, can kneel beside Jesus and offer my sufferings to God for His glory and my salvation. His Divine Son suffered even as I do. How good was Our Lord in revealing to us the merits hidden even in sufferings that appear to us as paltry, unimportant!

But the Holy Spirit reveals to us a third suffering of Jesus, even more astonishing. Our Lord began to fear and to be troubled. "Troubled?" Is not trouble the emotion of a



soul that is not entirely sure of itself, a soul that is no longer master of itself? Is it not the emotion of a soul that is disturbed, disquieted? Is it not the emotion of a soul that no longer possesses itself in peace? A generous soul permits itself to be troubled. A generous soul would rather await--with a collected and firm mind--whatever the will of God provides? Oh, my soul, why reproach me for being troubled? Why represent it as a moral defect? Jesus was even more troubled than I.

Yes, even when I am worried or troubled, I can go to Gethsemane. I can prostrate myself at the side of Jesus and offer my troubles to God. He will accept them. I suffer, then, as did my divine Model.

A note even more surprising is added to this score. Our Lord began to experience repugnance. He began to fear and to be heavy. Repugnance? Is not that the point where we begin to abandon everything? Does not aversion amount to repulsion, and that to a high degree? Repugnance--and of what? Of His Passion. Of all that was most holy in the will of His Father. His repugnance was so profound that He was almost overcome by it. He could hardly control Himself.

Oh, my soul, why reproach me for my repugnances? Jesus suffered from repugnance of His sufferings before I did, and more than I ever have. You will that I love suffering? Jesus did not love it. He did not feel any attraction for suffering. On the contrary, it inspired him with fear, with sorrow, with repugnance. In the midst of my own repugnances of all kinds, I can still prostrate myself at Gethsemane and offer to God those pains that devour my heart. It was thus that His Divine Son suffered.

The Gospel says then He commenced to fear. Fear? Is not that a cowardly sentiment, small, miserable, despicable? Is not that the sentiment of a soul that feels itself to be weakening, that sees its courage evaporating? Fear? Is not that the feeling of a soul that asks itself a second later if it can still hold out, still consent to suffer?

Our Lord was fearful, and of what? He was fearful of what was most sacred and most holy to Him. He feared His mission--His vocation of redemption.

Oh, my soul, why do you reproach me for being fearful? Jesus was fearful before ever I was, and even more than I, yet He is my model in suffering.

Even, then, in the midst of my fears, even while I feel myself to be so poor, so weak, in my discouragements, in my despairs, I can go to Gethsemane. I can kneel by the side



of Jesus and offer my sufferings to God, who will receive them favorably for they resemble the sufferings of His Son.

To suffer generously, I once believed, was to suffer with a courage that never winces. I thought it meant to go to meet suffering, to hold out my arms to it. Now I understand we can suffer just as generously, yet suffer with sorrow, fear, worry, and repugnance--that we can suffer miserably.

When, in the midst of suffering, we feel our heart to be resigned and generous, it is to be feared that self-love is taking its toll. But to suffer without realizing that one is suffering well, to suffer with all the sorrow and discouragement that lead one to believe all merit is lost, we are even offending God with our lack of generosity, this is to suffer without any consolation. This is pure suffering. When a soul is conscious of its generosity, it can testify it is fully resigned to the will of God. Thus, its sorrows are softened. But to suffer in such an interior confusion that no luster issues from the suffering, when one fears one's pains are sterile—ah, that is suffering par excellence! It is that of Our Lord in the Garden of Olives!

Let us accompany Our Lord further in the Passion of His Heart and we will find more precious lessons. When Our Lord arrived in the Garden of Olives, He knew His agony was about to begin and He took with Him three apostles, Peter, James, and John, the identical three who had accompanied Him to Thabor. He did not wish to be alone in His sorrow. He longed to have near Him hearts that would sympathize and console Him. He was begging, wordlessly, for a little consolation. "Watch ye, therefore, and pray with Me." I have encountered critics who declare, "to merit, we should refuse all aid, all consolation." They forbid seeking a little support, a little spiritual comfort, lest all merit be lost.

Was not Our Lord a martyr to grief? Yet, He sought consolation. It is true, Our Lord's attempt failed. He came to His disciples and found them sleeping. He returned to His prayer, then came a second time to seek a little consolation from His apostles, whom, only an hour before, He had called His "friends." I have, therefore, the right to go to a friend or a superior in whom I can confide, that I might find some comfort in his sympathy, his counsel. I have the right to seek out my spiritual director. He will have



precious words to offer me, words of life that will help me. I have the privilege of seeking to open my heart to those who have the right to console, to aid me. This does not mean I lose the merit of suffering.

Our Lord fell to His knees. He began to pray. He prayed a strange prayer! Do I hear it right? "My Father, if it be possible, remove this chalice from Me!"

But, oh, my good Master, this chalice is the will of Your Father! This chalice, if You drain it, means our salvation. You came into the world to drink this chalice. It is Your vocation. And You refuse it? You ask that it be withdrawn from Your lips? "Father, if it be possible, remove this chalice from Me!" Our Lord is the model of all generosity. Yet, in spite of this, His poor human Heart did not want to suffer.

Oh, my soul, why do you afflict me? Why do you reproach me? because at the foot of the tabernacle I, too, have said, "Lord, if it be possible, remove this trial from me; let this suffering be softened. If it be possible, let the designs of Your providence be changed. If it be possible, remove this cup from my lips."

It is true Our Lord added, "Not My will, but Thine be done." But after having made this act of resignation, He seemed to retract it and to begin His former prayer again, "Father, if it be possible, remove this chalice from Me." Then, for two whole hours He was hard pressed to say, "Thy will be done."

My dear friends, you, too, have sometimes come to the foot of the altar to protest to the Lord that you accept a certain trial. An hour later, you are surprised to find yourself saying, "My God, if it be possible, remove this cup from me." Within the Heart of Jesus, He experienced identical fluctuations between acceptance and refusal, between resignation and repugnance. Our Lord had His own interior conflicts. We can well have ours.

The last prayer of Jesus, the prayer that terminated those fluctuations between resignation and acceptance, was, "Father, not My will, but Thine be done."

Do you grasp the full significance of these words? I do not know of any words so human in the entire Gospel, that so bring Our Lord down to our own stature. Do you grasp their full meaning?



Our Lord did not say, "Father, I will what You will. My will is Your will." No, their significance was just the opposite. "Father, not My will, but Thine be done." Meaning, "Father, do not ask Me to will what You will. Everything within Me is repugnant to suffering. This is all that I can bring Myself to say, 'Our two wills are not in accord, but since one must be sacrificed, let it be Mine—let Your will be done, not Mine.' "

How good of Our Lord to make Himself a model for our weakness to copy and to give us, in His Person, so many motives for encouragement, making it easy for us to imitate Him. He repeats the same lessons over and over, bringing them down to our measure. He permits us to read within His Heart so many lessons of the very essence of divine wisdom, of charity.

Thus, it seems to me that I can present myself to Your will, Oh my God, and say in the simplicity of my heart, "My God, our two wills are not in accord, but carry out Your will. Close Your ears to my groans, to my complaints, to my reproaches."

Our Lord, after His prayer, after His resistance to suffering, felt His strength failing. He fell, His face to the earth. Bloody sweat poured from His Body, running down to the earth. He fell in an agony.

Severe, austere directors say to a poor soul, "What? You think your health is injured by your moral sufferings? You have become ill? Why, you lack moral strength, energy, and generosity. Had you been more resigned to God's will, your health would have held up." Did Our Lord act that way? Was He not generous? He, the model of all generosity? He finally became exhausted, threw Himself upon the earth, and sweated blood through all the pores of His sacred Body. If He experienced such weakness, so can I.

An angel came from heaven to comfort and sustain Him. When God sends an angel to comfort me—an understanding friend, a confessor—I reproach myself for accepting consolation. I reproach myself for not rejecting the aid of an angel. I believe myself to have lost all merit because I accepted such consolation. Did Our Lord refuse the angel's aid? Was it by chance that the angel was sent from Paradise? Did Jesus refuse the help sent Him from His Father? Does perfection require refusing the help that comes to us from God? When He sends us an angel, we must know how to benefit from the encounter.



Without a doubt, there remains a certain balance to observe. But Our Lord has furnished us with the example.

**"My God, when You send Your angel to me,  
I shall accept his help. I shall rejoice in his consolations."**

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